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ABSTRACT AND PRACTICAL ETHICS.

THIS paper is meant as a reply to a criticism that was recently made in public on the method of the London Ethical Society and kindred organizations. The method in question, so far as I understand it, is to assist practice by popularizing, through public lectures and printed papers, the best results of the systematic study of ethics. But now we are told that "these results are 'abstract' and, as such, irrelevant to the problems which the practical reformer has to face. At a time when the chief duty of the moralist, who is more than a mere student of ethical theories, is to touch the conscience and stimulate to active service in the cause of social justice, it is a species of solemn trifling to invite people to academic discussions upon the nature of the good and kindred topics." In opposition to this view I wish to show that the method of studying moral and social problems which we here aim at encouraging is not so far removed from everyday life as might at first be supposed, and that the kind of ideas for which we stand, so far from being "abstract" in any sense that is opposed to practice, are the only kind that are really practical.

I.

I shall begin with a definition of our terms. What is meant by "abstract" and "practical" ethics, respectively?

By abstract ethics would usually be meant the theoretic dis-

cussion of the nature of human conduct and the elements of human well-being. As an example of such a discussion we might take the controversy that has raged from the beginning among moralists as to whether the end is happiness or perfection. But this definition would not be sufficient to distinguish "abstract" from any other kind of ethics. For all ethics is abstract in this sense. It is a system of thoughts and judgments and all thoughts are abstract in the sense that they are "of" or "about" an object; they are not the object itself.

But if we look closer we shall see that there is an intelligible sense in which we may speak of an ethics which is abstract and contrast it with an ethics which is not. For while ethics has to do with thoughts or ideas, and all ideas are abstract, yet there are abstractions within abstractions. Among ideas of an object we must recognize a distinction between the idea which is abstract in the sense that it is one-sided and partial and the idea which, by holding together different sides or aspects of the thing, aims at becoming concrete as the object itself is concrete. In the sense first mentioned, thoughts or ideas are by their nature abstract. It is no reproach to them that they are so. In the latter sense of the term abstract, it is a radical defect of our thoughts to remain abstract when they might be concrete.

If now with this distinction in mind we ask who is it who thinks abstractly? we are apt to get an answer that throws a curious light on the antithesis with which we started, between the abstract thinker and the practical man. For we are apt to find that the so-called practical and matter-of-fact people, instead of being those who have the firmest hold upon the concrete in the sense above defined, are just the people who are most likely to become the victims of abstractions. People, on the other hand, who are sometimes thought of as idealists and dreamers may be just the people who are most likely to be free of them.

This, at any rate, was the conclusion at which the philosopher Hegel arrived when in a well-known pamphlet he addressed himself to this question. "Who" he asked, "thinks abstractly?" And he answers "Not the man of culture, far less the philoso-

pher, but the uneducated and the so-called practical man." His examples are so vivid and so aptly illustrate what is here meant by an abstract idea that I make no apology for quoting them.

A murderer is being dragged to execution. The multitude see only the criminal in him and follow him with their curses. Some fine ladies remark what a powerful, handsome, interesting man he is. The bystanders are scandalized that anyone should be so lost to propriety as to find good looks in a murderer. A priest who stands by and understands the heart explains that it all comes of the corruption of the upper classes. This illustrates one abstraction. These people see only the murderer in the prisoner. They take no account of his upbringing, the traits of character he has inherited, the previous harsh sentence for some trivial offence that embittered him against society. But, besides the common-sense practical people among the crowd, there are the idealists and sentimentalists. They see nothing of the murderer in the unhappy man, but only the scapegoat of an unjust society. They shout in his honor and would fain throw bouquets on the cart that carries him. This illustrates the opposite abstraction. These people see only what may be alleged in justification of the individual. The outrage on social institutions escapes them. Finally there is an old woman from the poor-house who is overheard to say as the sunlight strikes upon the prisoner: "See how sweetly God's gracious sunshine falls upon poor Binder's head." She means it in allusion to the German proverb that a worthless man does not deserve the sun. That was the multitude's view of Binder. God thought otherwise and the old woman recognizes it. She does not, like the sentimentalist, simply cancel his guilt. On the other hand, she does not see in him merely the accursed murderer. He is going to pay—perhaps rightly—the last penalty to human law, but in the judgment passed by society upon him, society itself is judged. This is *concrete* thinking. The different sides or aspects of the event have *grown together* or *coalesced* in a higher and a truer view.

What we are called upon to notice in all this is that the "abstract" idea is not the more remote and difficult to reach, but

the first view that strikes us—which is necessarily superficial and onesided. Its opposite is the concrete idea, which in turn is not what first occurs to us, but is further away and is only to be reached by a gift of insight, as in the case of the old woman, or as in the case of most of us by a strenuous effort of comprehensive thought. Employed as descriptions of different species of ethics we shall call that kind abstract which is in such a hurry to be practical that it turns in distaste from the labor of impartial thinking, and is content with seeing human life in a light which may be as narrow and one-sided as you please, so long as it affords justification for energetic action. That ethics, on the other hand, is concrete which is determined at all costs to understand before it undertakes and is content to postpone practical results in favor of a clear and comprehensive view of the end that it is sought to attain. It remains to be shown that the latter kind instead of being hostile to practice is really, and in the long run, the more practical of the two.

But before attempting to show this, let us ask, secondly, in what sense we are to take the word “practical.” What is meant by “practical ethics?” The sense that is in the mind of our critic is clear. Practical ethics are ethics which lay down some practical end as a moral duty and exhort to its pursuit. But this overlooks the fact that such ends may be practical in a twofold sense. They may be practical in the sense that they are proposed as aims of conduct. In this sense any idea may be practical. Any idea may be made a motive of action. I have an idea of a world in which everyone is rich and happy, and this idea may become practical in being made an end of action. But clearly amongst such ends there will be a difference between those that are really practical and those which are not, between those that we are justified in believing will be realized and those which never can be. However active and enthusiastic a man might be in pursuit of the latter kind, it would require a stretch of language to call him a practical man. The conclusion is that by practical ethics we ought to mean not simply the ethics which exhorts to practice, but the ethics

which sets before us as worthy ends ideas which are *really* practical in the sense that they are in harmony with the moral aspirations of mankind at large, and must sooner or later be realized in the actual relations of human society. How are we to describe such ideas in terms of the distinction already drawn? Are they abstract or are they concrete? If the kind we called abstract are the kind that are really practical, then the man who wishes to be practical will do well to suspect the gifts of the ethical society. If, on the other hand, I can succeed in showing that to be practical we must be concrete, I shall have established a presumption in favor of their utility. Let us see.

II.

There is undoubtedly a common prejudice that the ideas that can be realized in practice must be of the kind I have called abstract. We cannot drive six abreast through Temple Bar and we cannot get everything that we wish. We must cut our coat according to our cloth and the cloth is never enough for the pattern we should like to cut. It is in the nature of things that we should be content with partial success. Practice is made up of compromises, and blessed is the man who does not expect too much.

Now compromise is a large subject and I do not propose to enter on it here. It is sufficient to point out that it is one thing to accept the conditions under which our ideal of what is best must be realized, it is another to give up the hope of ever realizing it and settling down contentedly to live from hand to mouth. The former is compromise in one sense. The Greeks would have called it practical wisdom. The latter is compromise in another. Modern politicians call it opportunism. The admission that in practical policy we must go a step at a time is therefore in no wise inconsistent with the contention that no noble and lasting work was ever done except under the inspiration of some distant and for the present unrealizable idea. And such an ideal, if the work is to be really noble and lasting, must be of the kind for which I am contending: it must be a concrete ideal taking in all the

elements of the problem to be solved. Anything else, however feasible at the time it may appear, must turn out in the end to be impracticable. The forces of reality are leagued against it. However favorable to it the circumstances may seem to be, there is no sure footing for it in the actual world. With the concrete idea all this is reversed. Let a man but have hold of such an idea, the whole world may be against him; in the end it will come round to him. As Emerson would have said, he has hitched his chariot to a star. He may *seem* to fail. He may die without seeing the fruit of his labor. But the idea lives and he may rest in peace. In such an idea he has the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

History will serve us best in illustration. It exhibits abstractions on a large scale. I take one or two almost at random. Everyone is familiar with the part played in the course of the French Revolution by "abstract ideas." Issuing from the brain of that prince of abstract thinkers, Jean Jacques Rousseau, they controlled the whole movement and had a splendid chance. Founded on the historical examples of Greece and Rome, preached with all the eloquence of the greatest prose writer of his time, dominating a great national uprising, accepted as the creed of the party that finally triumphed over the storm, here, if anywhere, abstract ideas might be expected to succeed. And yet it might with truth be said that not one of Rousseau's positive proposals succeeded in establishing itself as an actual institution.

Equally striking is the example of the idea that dominated the succeeding decade—the idea of a French Empire founded on the ruins of national liberty in Europe. Every circumstance seemed to combine to favor its realization. Yet the whole power of the greatest military genius the world has ever seen was insufficient to establish the Napoleonic abstraction in the face of the forces that concrete reality had at its disposal to oppose it. These ideas failed because they did not correspond to the actual wants of the time. They were not in the line of actual progress. There was no place for them in the moral order that was then on the point of establishing itself among the nations of Europe.

If on the other hand you desire an example of the power of a concrete idea, you may go to Professor Seeley's life of Stein who was Napoleon's contemporary. From the very first the great Prussian minister was in contact with reality. He had conceived the idea of nationality in all its depth and complexity as the living moral force of the time. He was almost alone among the leading men in Europe in his belief in it. Even to Goethe with his magnificent humanitarianism it seemed but a thin abstraction. Everything was against it. The national rising in Spain was a miserable failure. Austria showed no response to it. Russia was cold. Yet Stein stuck doggedly to it and in the long run, in spite of incredible discouragement and opposition, so far succeeded in organizing the national feeling in Prussia as to prepare the way for the fall of Napoleon and lay the foundation of the modern German Empire and modern German civilization. Whether the evil influence of abstract ideas may not be overruled and in the long run turned to good, as it has been asserted that the despotism of Napoleon was turned to good in that it roused the spirit of freedom in the nations of Europe, is another question. To the individual, at any rate, and especially to the individual who thirsts to be practical, it is a poor consolation to recognize that the good has triumphed and the world got its way in spite of, or even because of, his efforts to oppose it.

These illustrations are from politics. In ethics and philosophy the autobiography of John Stuart Mill offers an historical illustration. Mill, it will be remembered, was brought up by his father in the strictest sect of the pleasure philosophy. He was trained from his youth up to look for all the law and the prophets to the utilitarian school, especially to its great founder Jeremy Bentham. Bentham's contribution to ethics (as is well known) was not his theory that happiness is the end, but that the happiness-giving properties of objects and actions may be reduced to scientific measurement and that the art of life consists in the just appreciation of the pleasure value of objects of desire. As a devout Benthamite, Mill sought to perfect himself

in this art and to become a kind of professor of it. But the more of an adept he became in this moral arithmetic, the further he seemed to be from the promised happiness. Measuring all objects of pursuit by their capacity to give positive pleasure, the interest in the objects themselves seemed to evaporate and life to appear sordid and empty. He has described the period of moral depression which supervened upon this discovery in one of the most interesting passages in philosophical biography. He only finally succeeded in escaping from it by casting aside the pleasure-calculus as a guide to happiness, and throwing himself into the concrete interests of life. He explained his experience as an instance of what he called the paradox of Hedonism: the paradox, namely, that to obtain happiness you must cease to aim at it as an end, "to get it you must forget it." The explanation sufficed to save the credit of the school among the followers of Mill, but it could not be expected that it would satisfy anyone else. The true explanation, of course, is that pleasure is only one element in well-being, and only by a confusion could be mistaken for the whole of it. The idea that it was the whole was an abstract idea in the sense for which I have contended and it revealed its abstractness the moment that a consistent attempt was made to apply it to practice, by refusing to work at all.

The bearing of these examples on the present argument is plain. If in order to be practical in the best sense ideas must be concrete, and if concrete ideas cannot, as a rule, be had without serious intellectual effort, there is at least a presumption in favor of an institution one of whose professed objects is to offer a hand to anyone who is willing to make the effort required.

III.

I have tried to establish a general presumption in favor of the "abstract" study of ethics. But this is not all that may be said: it may be pleaded also that rising out of the special character of the time in which we live there is at present a special need for such a study.

Our age, we are often told, is an age of transition. This

means among other things that on many subjects that concern the life and destiny of human beings, we no longer stand where we used to. The old maxims and the old authorities that existed to enforce them no longer suffice us. New ideas of individual life are opening up to us, new types of character appeal to us. The center of authority has shifted from the pulpit to the press.

And what is true of individual is still more obviously true of social life. For a century or more we have ceased to see any special sacredness in established forms of government or indeed in any of the fixed forms of social or industrial life. Prescription is no defence. Every one of them is called upon to submit itself to the test of reason and experience. By its utility it must stand or fall.

The consequence of all this is that people who are in earnest about individual or public duty are beset by perplexities that did not trouble an earlier generation. They have lost faith in the precedents and authorities to which it would have appealed with the result that they are thrown upon their own private judgment in many matters that would have been settled for them in another age. Under these circumstances it need hardly be said that there is danger of mistake where formerly there was none. What precisely the danger is and whence it arises is a more difficult question. The answer will bring us to our point. We shall prepare the way for it if we consider for a moment the nature and origin of the forms we are leaving behind us and the kind of service they performed for our ancestors.

Take first the religious formulæ of the ages of faith. With all their crudity these continue to impress us with the richness and many-sidedness of their contents. And this becomes comprehensible when we remember that these forms obtained their hold upon mankind because they represented many streams of thought and aspiration. The theological doctrines we find epitomized in our articles of religion and confessions of faith were the issue of an earnest attempt on the part of their framers to grasp the meaning of life in all its manifold relations. It was only natural, accordingly, that so long as they were acquiesced

in they should exercise a double influence over human thought. In some respects undoubtedly they were repressive. This is the side of them that is now commonly emphasized. But in another respect they were expansive and in the strictest sense educative. To understand them called for an effort in the believer—too great an effort as we now think, considering the amount of truth that they contained, yet an effort which had its reward in a dignified and comprehensive view of human nature.¹ Similarly the catechisms professed to expound the whole duty of man and present us with an ideal of character which we must admit was conceived with extraordinary breadth and insight.

What is true of moral and religious formulæ is true also of the older forms of social, industrial, and political organization. They did not, of course, leave room for wants that are of recent development, but so far as they went they represented in broad outline the organic requirements of human life. In the times when they are generally accepted there was not much danger that essential elements in human nature should fail to have justice done them.

But they are no longer accepted. We have outgrown the forms that have hitherto served us. New needs have developed. New classes claim to share the provision that was made for the old ones. The younger generation is knocking at the door. Here and there it is ready to pull down the house if admission be refused it. All this lays a new obligation upon those whose special duty it is as leaders of opinion to recognize those new demands and to point out how they are to be satisfied consistently with the maintenance of the conditions of order and progress in human society. Such persons are called to a new task which can only be adequately performed on the basis of a comprehensive review of the elements of the problem, involving nothing short of the attempt to reconstruct in thought the whole scheme of social life, and to justify to the

¹ This was what led F. D. Maurice into his paradoxical defence of the Thirty-nine Articles as "guiding the student of humanity and divinity into a pathway of truth, and pointing out to him the different forms of truth"—*Life*, Vol. I, p. 524.

reason forms and institutions that have hitherto rested on instinct or interest. This, it will be admitted, is a hard enough task under any circumstances. But the difficulty is greatly increased under the circumstances of pressing practical need, in which, as we have seen, it has to be attempted.

It is precisely here that the above-mentioned danger comes in. The danger is lest in our haste to formulate the new ethical creeds and the new programmes of political reform we overlook fundamental elements in human nature and ignore organic needs. Expressed in the terms this paper has tried to make familiar, it is lest, overborne by the clamor of those who "know in part and prophesy in part," we betray the trust we have received from the time in which we live, and resign the call "to see life steadily and see it whole."

That this danger is not an imaginary one is seen in the conflict of opinion that exists among would-be leaders on many of the most fundamental questions of social life. Many of these illustrate what we mean by an abstraction in the field of politics, and may be taken as typical of the leading forms of abstract ideas in general.

First we have those who may be said to be abstract thinkers because they see the whole without seeing the parts. An important species under this class are the people who see the end without seeing the means. As a rule they are people who have a high ideal of what human life may be, but they are apt to have little or no idea of how their ideal is to be realized. The better type of anarchist is an extreme instance here. The anarchist is a man who looks forward to a time when the law of life shall be the law of liberty, when the cumbrous apparatus of law, with its class bias, its blunders, and its incitements to crime, will no longer exist, when no man shall say, "Know the Lord," for all shall know him, and when force and compulsion shall be things of the past. He is an extreme type, but to the same brotherhood belong all those who, confining themselves to less sudden and sweeping changes, set down all our troubles, moral and social, to some single economic abomination or group of

abominations. They have the same ideal as the anarchist, it may be, but it is not law and government themselves, but rent, or interest, or profit, or all of them together under the general head of the individual ownership of capital, that is to blame. They are the kind of people who stand as "independent" candidates and go to make up independent parties. What they may do or become in the future, when they have got into touch with fact, it would be vain to prophesy. In the meantime they strike one often as impractical, and sometimes as worse. And the reason is that they are abstract thinkers in the sense described. Their ideas are not in touch with reality at any point at which force may be profitably exercised with a view to improving upon it in the direction of their ideal. They have too great a contempt for what actually exists to hold parley with it at any point. "Things are all wrong." The whole established fabric of society is rotten. There is not even a sound plank on which they can stand to begin the task of setting it right, and so they are apt either to fall back into the ranks of the unemployed politician, the writer, and agitator and do nothing at all; or, if they set their hand to what other people are doing, to be an incalculable and unreliable element, the despair of their friends and the derision of their enemies.

Shakespeare, who knew everything, knew of this type and the trouble they might be to themselves and others in the pursuit of their ends.

"Fie on't, O fie," says Hamlet, "'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely."

"The time is out of joint; O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right."

A great deal has been written and said about the source of Hamlet's ineffectiveness. Some have attributed it to his "native irresolution," others to a deep-rooted pessimism, others to his so-called madness. In this difference of learned opinion, perhaps I may be permitted to claim him as a case of an abstract thinker of the kind I am speaking of. He has noble views of things in

general, but is lamentably out of touch with the particular. It is not that he has been at college too long and has thought too much. He has really left it too soon and has thought too little. A little thought, like a little knowledge, is a dangerous thing. With Hamlet the consequence is that he halts and hesitates in action, and when he does act seems to abandon himself to the impulse of the moment and to be the victim of mere caprice. And so, instead of setting anything right, he sets everything wrong.

The moral is that our duty to the world is never to set everything right, for things are never all wrong. If they were, it would be a hopeless task to set about improvement in any form. Mr. Punch has made us laugh at the anarchist who appeals to the British policeman when he has got himself into trouble, but the caricature contains the profounder suggestion that it is, after all, to the *status quo* that the revolutionist must appeal as the foundation for the state of things which he hopes to establish. It is not only that he relies on human nature as it now is—itsself the product of the old order—as the root from which the new order is to spring, but he uses present laws and institutions, a free press and public platforms, posts and railways, parliaments and policemen, as the means of propagating the knowledge of it and preparing the way for its acceptance. This criticism is not, of course, meant to justify obstruction or indifference to progress. Though all can never be wrong—the existence of even one faithful soul to recognize it as wrong or to protest against it means that something, at least, is right—yet there is always something wrong somewhere, which each of us probably was born to set right. But the point to notice is that it is always a very definite thing, whether a defect in our own character or a defect in our neighbor's drains. When we examine it, moreover, we shall probably find that it is not something wholly new which we are required to do, but something in the line of what has been already done, developing and extending to a new case a principle already recognized.

A second type which is even commoner than the man who sees the whole without seeing the parts, the end without the means, is the man who contrariwise sees the part without seeing the whole.

As an example of this abstraction, we may take the man who sees one thing wrong here, another there, but has no clear idea of what is right as a whole or of the direction in which progress ought to move. He sees marks of social disease at this point or at that, but has no articulate conception of what social *health* in the long run means. And so when he sets to work upon a remedy he is apt to be like the doctor who treats the symptoms instead of the disease. As the former type may usually be known by their contempt for law and government, the people I am now speaking of may usually be recognized by their exaggerated faith in the mechanism of parliament. They aim rather at altering the law than at altering the law-giver. Mr. Herbert Spencer is in bad odor with the newer school of philosophical radicals. He has been roundly and, as I think, rightly denounced on account of his abstract and doctrinaire individualism. And yet there is this of truth at the bottom of his denunciation of laws and law-givers, that hasty legislation dealing with isolated evils is not unlikely in suppressing one only to create another. Mr. Spencer draws the conclusion that since we are so likely to do mischief by legislation we had much better cease to legislate altogether. The argument does not, of course, support this conclusion, but it is a forcible reminder of the obligation politicians are under to make sure before they proceed to legislate that they have as concrete a view as possible of the purpose for which the new act is devised and the circumstances under which it works.

IV.

One or two difficulties raised by the above contention remain to be considered. After the example just quoted, it may suggest itself to some that my indictment is, after all, not against these particular extremes of tendency alone, but against all

party or sectional action whatsoever. For is not every party and every opinion that has a name at all marked with the same one-sidedness? Do not all the names by which leading schools of moralists and reformers are known conceal such abstractions as we have been speaking of? Are not one set of abstractions indicated by individualist, conservative, moderate, another by socialist, liberal, progressive? One set by realist, utilitarian, naturalist, another by idealist, mystic, supernaturalist? And if this is so, will it not be safer for us to keep clear of them altogether, and refuse to call ourselves by any of them?

The fact is undoubtedly true. These names strictly taken do conceal abstractions. But it is to be noted that the defect in question attaches not to names of schools of moralists and politicians alone, but to names of any kind. Logic, as we all know, divides names into concrete names and abstract names, but the truth is that all names are abstract. It is of the nature of names to be abstract, for they all indicate only one side or aspect of the thing they denote. If, therefore, we are going to wait till we can find a name which will express everything we are before we consent to call ourselves anything, we shall have to be content to remain nameless. The one-sidedness of a name is in reality no reason why we should refuse to call ourselves by it, if we find ourselves in general sympathy with the party which adopts it. It is, on the other hand, a very good reason why we should be on our guard against the one-sidedness of thought which the name suggests. The penalty that attaches to the neglect of this precaution illustrates a peculiar attribute of abstractions which has often been pointed out. I have already said that abstract ideas are impractical ideas. Circumstances are sure to defeat them. But this is not all. It requires to be added that they defeat themselves. For abstractions are a kind of extreme and like extremes they tend to meet. It is impossible for me at this stage in my paper to illustrate this property of abstractions with any fullness. I may, however, in passing refer to a familiar example of it. We shall all admit that there is such a thing as extreme individualism. One of the

marks of it is that it is chiefly effective in promoting socialism. The extreme individualist stands in practice and theory by the rights of property in the most exclusive sense. But the effect of this on the general public is merely to undermine the respect for property, on which all the so-called rights must ultimately rest, and so to play into the hands of the socialist. And the same is true in another way of extreme socialism. What is more common than to see ardent socialists advocating as a cure for starvation-wages communistic palliatives, which, if widely applied, could only have the effect of weakening the general movement in the direction of better pay, and so playing into the hands of the individualist?

This paper will not have been addressed to an English audience if it has not suggested to some, as a final objection to the contention it urges, that it is after all the merest commonplace. "You are only elaborating with a great deal of unnecessary flourish the truism that we must look at both sides of the shield, and consider all questions that come before us from every available point of view. In life and politics, especially, we have to remember that we have to do with all sorts and conditions of men, and with all varieties of taste. We must be prepared, then, for a little of everything—a little realism and a little idealism, a little socialism and a little individualism, a touch of optimism to give dignity and a touch of pessimism and of the devil to give a relish to our opinions. We are to go a certain way with the advocates of all these doctrines, but 'not too far.'" Well, perhaps I do mean partly this, but I mean a good deal more. For it is possible to look at both sides of the shield without seeing them both as sides of the same shield, and it is possible to see many aspects of a question and to see how people might differ upon it without seeing how the different aspects complement one another in the whole that is broken up between them. It is this *comprehensive* view for which I have been putting in a plea. In this view we not only see the various sides, we *unite* them. In order to do so we must not merely go round and round, we must take our stand at the center. And

this center in morals and politics, as I have tried to show, is nothing else than human character itself.

In advocating the importance of taking such a stand with a view to effective practice, I must not, of course, be understood to be requiring that all would-be reformers should leave the platform and the committee room and devote themselves to an arduous course of moral philosophy. In reform, as elsewhere, we must have division of labor; and those who are the best thinkers may likely enough be unfitted for effective action. My contention is that *if* they are it will be for other reasons than the nature of their ideas, and that those whose profession it is to carry ideas into practice will not be the worse but in every way the better for possessing themselves by every means in their power of the results of the best thinking on the subject of the ends and ideals of human life.

Ethical societies aim, as I understand them, at bringing these results within the reach of busy people so that he who runs may read. In pursuing this aim they may require to have recourse to propositions of a high degree of generality—if you like, of abstractness. In this respect their teaching will be colorless and forbidding. “Philosophy,” says Hegel, “paints her grey in grey,” and this is not less true of ethical philosophy than of philosophy in general. But in stating its formulæ and calling upon thinking people to understand them, ethics is not forsaking reality and losing touch with practice. On the contrary, its most recent formulæ represent the attempt to rise above the half-truths of current reflection, to embrace more of reality, and so by setting man’s life in a truer perspective to give it greater significance. So far from its being a matter of indifference to practice with what ideas we approach the problems of individual and social life, it is this that makes all the difference. “Conception,” says Walter Pater, “fundamental brain-work—that is what makes all the difference in art.” And what is true of the fine arts is, I venture to think, equally true of that finest of all the arts, the art of life.

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